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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2292
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1677
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001789

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ MEDIA: HOW TO UNDERSTAND IT ALL

REF: A. BISHKEK 1737
[1](#)B. BISHKEK 1742
[1](#)C. BISHKEK 1752
[1](#)D. BISHKEK 1763

BISHKEK 00001789 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARIE L. YOVANOVITCH, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

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[1](#)1. (U) This is the last in a series of cables on the state of the media in Kyrgyzstan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Many consider the Kyrgyz media to be the freest and liveliest in Central Asia, and there is no doubt that this is true. There are many options for news coverage and opinion, especially in the print media and on the Internet. This wide range of choices, however, is no guarantee of access to unbiased information. As in many parts of the former Soviet Union, most media outlets are controlled by the government or aligned with political factions. President Bakiyev, Prime Minister Kulov, and opposition politicians all have their champions in the media. Russian influence in the media is pervasive, whether through re-broadcasting of Russian television, or reliance on Russian wire services and Russian-controlled web sites. Among the hundreds of media instruments, merely a handful comes close to producing balanced and unbiased news. In Bishkek and other major cities throughout Kyrgyzstan, citizens may choose their sources of news and information based on their political beliefs and whom they support, but as ownership and management of media firms constantly change according to shifts in the political tides, knowing which news source to believe becomes quite challenging. END SUMMARY.

HOME-GROWN INFLUENCE

[1](#)3. (C) With the majority of Kyrgyzstan's news agencies controlled by the government or political factions, Kyrgyz politicians well understand that support from one or several media outlets is critical to their business and political

success. While political parties may not be able to afford a TV station, owning a newspaper is a more affordable option for most politicians and businessmen. Least expensive but requiring an understanding and progressive attitude about the Internet, blogs and forums are the fastest and easiest way to reach the educated youth and Kyrgyz intelligentsia. By controlling the only nationwide television and radio station (KTR), several newspapers, and a number of news websites, President Bakiyev wields the most influence and power throughout the media sector. Although the opposition will continue to demand that Bakiyev relinquish authority over KTR, the president will likely continue to guard control over the media mammoth.

RUSSIAN PRESS: SHAPING KYRGYZ VIEWS

14. (C) Wide-spread availability, cultural familiarity, and the absence of language barriers are all factors that lead Kyrgyz journalists to pluck news reports directly from the Russian press. Although occasionally using Russian press for coverage of major stories coming out of Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz press rely most heavily on Russian sources for their coverage of international news. Thus, much of the Kyrgyz public see the world through "Russified" glasses, cultivating opinions of world events and politics parallel to those of the Kremlin. This results in some negative press coverage of the perceived "meddling" of USG democracy programs, of suspicions regarding the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia, and of the "dangers" associated with the presence of a U.S. airbase.

WHAT DO YOU READ AND WHY?

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15. (C) During the November 2 demonstrations, TV viewers were offered two distinct versions in reporting of the events. Those who watched government-owned KTR would have thought that the demonstrators took to the streets to show support for President Bakiyev. In contrast, viewers of the pro-opposition channel NTS saw demonstrators demanding the resignation of Bakiyev and Kulov without ever seeing the pro-government demonstrations. Kyrgyzstan's citizens are faced with an ever-evolving decision to choose the right media source that, although may not be balanced and unbiased, will at least spin the news at an angle that coincides with their political and social principles. Within the last year, numerous media outlets have changed hands, and in turn, shifted their political leanings. Understanding what is going on in Kyrgyzstan entails more than picking up the latest paper or skimming a Kyrgyz news site on the web. The average Kyrgyz citizen probably does not delve into the subtext and accepts what is being reported as the truth. It may be vital for the reader, listener or viewer to know the political motives of their news source, which are closely tied to their ownership and financing, in order to peel away the slanted rhetoric to get to the truth. Thus, as is true of much of Kyrgyz politics and society, the truth often rests several layers below the surface.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

16. (C) The USG is actively involved in programs to support independent media in Kyrgyzstan, and to increase Western content and unbiased analysis in the coverage mix. For example, the USG (using funds from DRL) provided the funds to launch an independent printing press in Bishkek. USAID, through its program with Internews, has focused on training for journalists, but is also prepared to help if and when the government moves forward on its promises to transform KTR into an independent public entity. We have also encouraged our European colleagues to help to find a way to bring Euronews (in Russian) to NTS television, to provide some

Western content to television news coverage that is overwhelmingly dominated by Russian media sources. Our Public Affairs Section recently has organized tours for government press secretaries at Manas Airbase and for journalists, tours of USAID projects in the field.

17. (SBU) The media environment is changing, however, and we need to continue to be on the look out for new and innovative ways to get our message out to the most influential actors in society. The internet is rapidly taking on an importance in Kyrgyzstan among the professional classes and youth. We feel we need to establish both local and American officer positions to help us tailor our message and its delivery.
YOVANOVITCH